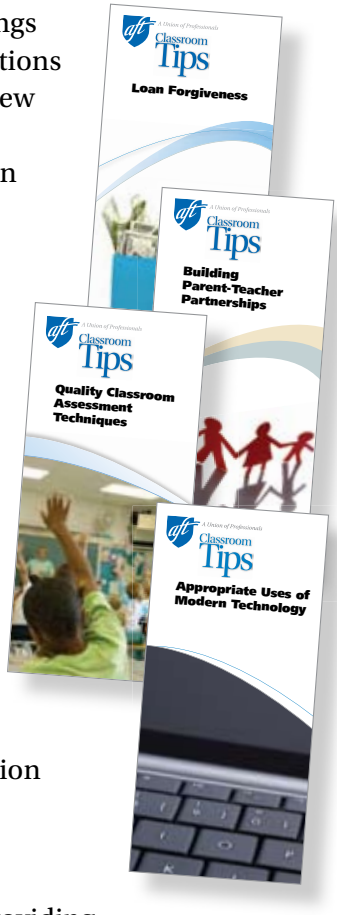
A Union of Professionals

Classroom Tips

Before the Year Begins

Classroom Tips

Each new school year brings high hopes, great expectations and challenges for both new and seasoned educators. The American Federation of Teachers (AFT) has developed a series called *Classroom Tips* to help educators start the year off right and anticipate the year ahead.



Classroom Tips is developed with you, the educator, in mind. The tips in this collection are taken from real classroom experiences and are part of the AFT's Educational Research and Dissemination (ER&D) professional development program.

The AFT is a leader in providing educators the resources they need to help them succeed. Visit AFT's Web site for classroom resources at **www.aft.org/tools4teachers** today.

Arranging Your Classroom

Good teachers know that the physical environment of the classroom can either enhance or hinder learning. Appropriate room preparation and arrangement of materials reserves class time for learning, while inadequate planning interferes with instruction by causing interruptions and delays.

An effective room arrangement also is essential to classroom management because it eliminates possible distractions and minimizes opportunities for students to disrupt others. When arranging student desks or tables, keep in mind potential distractions, such as windows and doors, small-group work areas or your desk. Leave enough room around student desks so that you can easily reach each person when monitoring or giving help. Plan to seat students who will need extra attention close to the area where you spend most of your time.

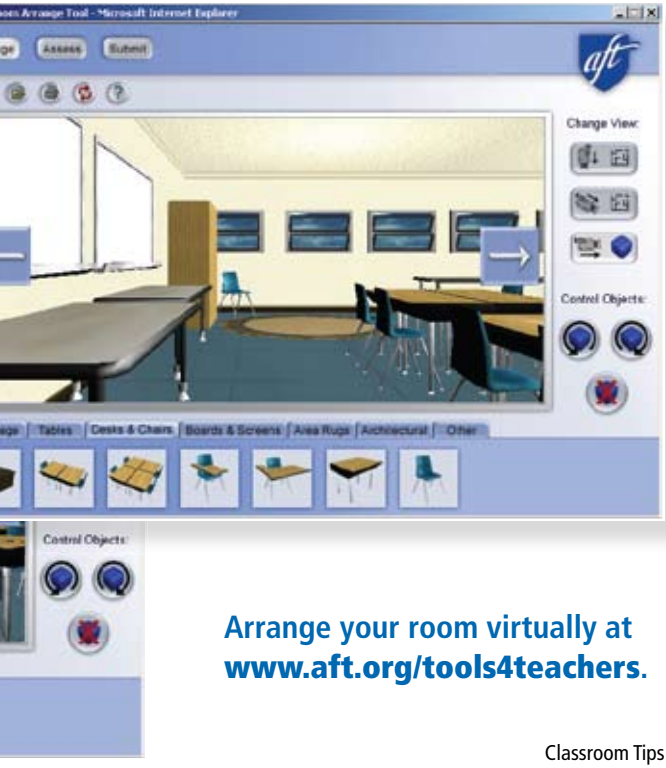
At the beginning of the year, consider arranging students' desks in rows facing the major instructional area. This will allow you to deliver instruction to the whole class, monitor student behavior more readily and become familiar with each student's work habits.

Once you have established your management system, you may want to move desks into clusters or other flexible groupings. Remember that your

classroom is the working environment for both you and your students. Research shows that effective managers take stock of their rooms and the characteristics of their students, and develop a room plan that meets their instructional, behavioral and organizational needs.

Keys to Good Classroom Design

- Ensure an easy flow of traffic throughout the room and keep high-traffic areas, such as those near the teacher's desk, pencil sharpener and wastebasket, free from congestion.
- Make sure you have a clear view of all students at all times.
- Ensure that students can easily see instructional displays and presentations.
- Make storage space and materials readily accessible.



Arrange your room virtually at www.aft.org/tools4teachers.

Procedures and Rules

Before the year begins, effective classroom managers carefully consider how they want their classroom to function and the way they want their students to behave. Good managers think through what procedures students need to know in order to perform specific activities, and they establish classroom rules that clearly articulate their expectations for behavior.

Procedures tell students how to perform routine instructional and housekeeping tasks.

A smooth-running classroom requires as many as 30 to 60 procedures. Examples of such routines include:

- Getting the teacher's attention;
- Using the pencil sharpener, bathroom or drinking fountain;
- Moving within and outside the classroom;
- Lining up;
- Storing personal belongings;
- Using learning centers; and
- Taking down and turning in assignments.

You should introduce procedures to students over a period of time, as needed. Sometimes it is necessary to modify procedures during the school year to adapt to changes in instruction or the needs of a particular class.

Rules tell students how they are expected to behave.

Rules apply to areas such as classroom interactions, respect for others and their property, and participation in class.

Effective managers establish only three to six "umbrella" rules that remain consistent throughout the year. Most rules are stated positively and are written in broad, general terms that require further thought and interpretation. Rules should be prominently posted in the classroom and should be introduced on the first day of school.

Examples of Classroom Rules

- Be prompt.
- Be prepared.
- Be polite.
- Be productive.

Reinforcing Your Expectations

Good teachers know that a positive classroom climate supports student learning. They create such an environment by communicating high expectations and standards, conveying confidence in students' abilities and praising good performance. These teachers provide incentives, rewards and recognition to highlight appropriate behavior. At the same time, however, effective managers must consider how they will respond when students misbehave. They create a system of fair and appropriate consequences to use when students do not cooperate.

Consequences are sanctions applied when students behave inappropriately.

Think of these interventions as a "hierarchy of consequences" that includes a range of sanctions, with each step increasing in seriousness in relation to the offense. It is particularly important to develop a range of minor interventions you can use without interrupting the instructional flow of the class. Such a system of consequences might include the following:

Minor Interventions

- Use nonverbal cues, such as looking directly at the student, frowning or using a hand signal.
- Move closer to the student.
- Direct a question to the student, using his or her name.
- Redirect the student to the task or activity.
- Remind the student of the rule or procedure not being followed.
- Have the student state the rule or procedure that applies and explain the behavior that would have been more appropriate.

- Tell the student, in a calm but authoritative tone, to stop the behavior.
- Move the student to another seat.

Moderate Interventions

- Have the student stay after class for a conference.
- Withhold a privilege or assign a penalty.
- Isolate the student in another part of the room.
- Send the student to a time-out area.
- Contact the student's parents to discuss the misbehavior.
- Assign after-school detention.
- Write a behavior contract.

Serious Interventions

- Remove the student from the class, following the school's disciplinary procedures.
- Schedule a formal parent conference to identify mutually agreed-upon interventions.
- Recommend that the student be suspended from class for a specified period of time.

Practice your intervention skills with the interactive "Defining Consequences for Behavior" at www.aft.org/tools4teachers.

Five Great Reasons to Join a Union of Professionals

The American Federation of Teachers:

1 **Supports you in the classroom.** Effective learning only takes place when high-quality teachers, with the support of other competent professionals, have the materials and assistance needed to accomplish the task. Your union is a strong advocate for quality classroom materials that are aligned to the standards of achievement we expect our students to meet. We also insist that state and district assessments for measuring student progress are aligned with these standards and that the assessments be used appropriately to support student learning.

2 **Helps you prepare.** No matter how well prepared you may have been before entering the classroom, there is always room for improvement. Ongoing professional development that meets you at your point of need is vital for continued growth as an educator. The AFT and its affiliates deliver some of the finest professional development programs available; and in situations where ours are not available, we advocate and broker for you to receive the best training possible.

3 **Stands up for you.** Whether the discussion is taking place in the White House, in the halls of Congress, on the floor of your statehouse, in colleges of education or in your local editorial pages, you can be sure that union representatives are weighing in assertively, ensuring that the collective voice of educators comes through clearly and effectively.

4 **Advocates for your profession.** No one enters the teaching profession without a strong desire to help children reach their potential. Yet, at times the realities of life make this calling difficult to stick with. Adequate salaries and benefits are essential in order to keep the best teachers, paraprofessionals and support staff in our public schools. Working conditions such as manageable class sizes, adequate teaching materials, and discipline policies that support teaching and enhance student learning are important factors in ensuring that the best teachers remain in the classroom.

5 **Keeps you informed.** *American Educator* is one of the most highly respected journals available to keep you informed on current thinking in public education by some of the most capable thinkers and doers in the field. *American Teacher* will keep you on top of the challenges and successes of your colleagues across the country. And a host of optional publications, as well as a comprehensive Web site that will assist you in addressing the particular needs of your school and classroom, provide the balance of a professional literature package that is second to none.

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Item no. 39-0090A
03/10